



PRESS RELEASE
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**PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS PROVING EFFECTIVE IN FIGHTING GUN
CRIME LOCALLY, NATIONALLY**

***Attorney General John Ashcroft Announces Record Increase in Federal Firearms
Prosecutions***

Jacksonville, Florida - Today U. S. Attorney Paul I. Perez joined Attorney General John Ashcroft in applauding federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors who are working together through Project Safe Neighborhoods to prevent and prosecute gun crime.

“Newly released data shows record levels of federal prosecutions of gun crime,” said Attorney General Ashcroft. “Gun criminals are paying unprecedented penalties, and law-abiding Americans are enjoying unprecedented safety. Under President Bush’s leadership, Project Safe Neighborhoods is making a tremendous difference in ensuring that gun crime equals hard time.”

“Project Safe Neighborhoods has been a top priority in the Middle District of Florida since I took office in March of 2002 and the number of gun cases prosecuted has more than doubled. We have joined forces with our State Attorneys and sheriffs to arrest and prosecute the worst of the worst repeat offenders,” said U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez. “The dedicated federal prosecutors in my office who work full time on Project Safe Neighborhoods gun cases have convicted and sent to prison numerous career armed criminals who no longer prey on our community.”

A Record of Increased Prosecutions. In the past three years, federal gun crime

prosecutions nationwide have increased by 68 percent. Between FY 2002 and FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased nearly 24 percent, and since FY 2000, there has been a 62 percent increase in defendants charged with firearm-related crimes.

Project Safe Neighborhoods first set a record in FY 2002 for increasing the number of defendants charged with gun-related crimes by 20 percent. During this year, Project Safe Neighborhoods set a new Justice Department record with nearly 23 percent more defendants charged with gun crimes.

Federal offenders are being sentenced to significant jail time. In FY 2003, 93 percent of defendants were sentenced to some prison time, and about 72 percent of offenders were sentenced to prison terms greater than three years.

A Drop in Violent Crime Victimization. The increased emphasis on prevention and prosecution of gun crimes makes our communities more safe by ensuring those who abuse firearms are not free to prey on our citizens. Between 1999-2000 and 2001-2002, the violent crime victimization rate nationwide plunged 21 percent. Approximately 130,000 fewer Americans were victims of gun crime in 2001-2002 than in 1999-2000.

National Scope, Local Impact. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an unprecedented partnership between all levels of government to implement a national strategy to attack gun crime with focus and intensity. While national in scope, each community's Project Safe Neighborhoods task force is working to design and implement a local approach to combat the unique criminal circumstances that area faces. Project Safe Neighborhoods relies on a seamless network of law enforcement professionals who utilize a strategy of cooperation and coordination to prevent illegal gun use, as well as punishing violators and putting criminals who use guns behind bars. Prosecutors pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms statutes. Community partners aggressively educate their constituents, such as youths in at-risk areas, about the consequences of illegal gun violence through services and resources provided by Project Safe Neighborhoods.

Local Project Safe Neighborhoods Successes within the Middle District of Florida

During the last two years, the number of gun prosecutions has almost doubled. In FY 2001 there were 64 cases, followed by 94 in FY 2002 and 118 in FY 2003. Here is a small sample of the many career criminals that have been sent to federal prison after being convicted of a gun crime.

In Jacksonville, Elliot Keith Anderson was sentenced to more than 17 years in prison after being arrested for possession of a handgun. A Jacksonville Sheriff's Office deputy stopped a vehicle for a routine traffic infraction. Anderson was a passenger in the car and was found in possession of a firearm. Working with federal agents, it was determined Anderson had an extensive criminal record that qualified him for sentencing enhancements.

In Orlando, Ronald Bernard Mills was sentenced to 106 years in prison for armed robbery of a bank and three convenience stores.

In Ft. Myers, Daniel J. Lyons, Jr., was sentenced more than 19 years imprisonment after being convicted of possession of four rounds of ammunition. Due to his extensive criminal record, he was considered an armed career criminal with fourteen felony convictions.

In Tampa, Kenneth Bernard Johnson was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison for felon in possession of a firearm. Johnson had a violent criminal history that also enhanced the sentencing guidelines.

Extensive training has been done throughout the Middle District of Florida to educate local law enforcement in the area of federal gun laws. Federal prosecutors, Assistant State Attorneys and federal A.T.F. agents have reached out to sheriffs and police departments and made themselves available to assist in the prosecution of repeat violent offenders who are arrested in possession of a firearm or ammunition. It is anticipated that continued prosecutions and convictions of violent offenders will result in a further drop in violent crime nationwide and in the Middle District of Florida.

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